

The Endless Dubiety of the *Testimonium Flavianum*

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Unanimity of Opinion is not Certainty

The way in which we express our questions or answers reproduces the degree of certainty or doubt about what we know. For example, when someone addresses the question, "Do you believe in God"? The need to use the word "believe", in this example, happens because the existence of god is a belief, or a hypothesis, therefore a doubt and not a certainty uniformly shared by all. For when there is doubt, then our knowledge of that thing or that person is a belief, not a certainty. Belief happens when we are not sure. On the other hand, in a very different way, nobody asks another, "Do you believe that two plus two are four"? This is because mathematics is not a belief, it is not a doubt, because it is an exact science, it is demonstrable and recognized by all. So, when we talk about a subject that carries doubts, we then emit beliefs, opinions, hypotheses, conjectures and speculations, when we deal with a subject loaded with certainty, what we pronounce is fact, confirmation, universal sharing and irrefutability.

Thus, when dealing with doubt, what we seek to find is the greater or lesser degree of probability, while, when we work with certainty, what we seek is the greater or lesser degree of proof and accuracy. From a scientific point of view, these two ways of searching depend on the greater, lesser or no availability of evidence. Therefore, in the absence of evidence, we work with speculation or,

what is somewhat safer, with the debate using theoretical arguments and hypotheses, which leads to a greater or lesser degree of probability, but not scientific certainty.

Now, what needs to be clarified is a confusion that happens in the mind of many careless religious authors, that is, to think that unanimity of opinions means certainty. Conversely, a fact or an idea can be believed by many or all and not be reality. Take the example of the geocentric idea, whose belief in the centrality of the Earth was shared by everyone for a long time, or by almost everyone, therefore a unanimity of opinions, but, after centuries of reliability, its unreality was proved by Copernicus and others subsequent astronomers from the 16th century. A curiosity is the fact that many religious people confuse the high degree of probability, or the unanimity of opinions, with the certainty, because, accustomed as they are, with the vagueness and imprecision of religious ideas, some religious think that the high degree of probability is enough to be convinced of certainty. In the same way, if all or almost all scholars accept an opinion, then that opinion assumes the degree of certainty. Thus, for them, in many cases, if a theory is unanimously accepted, then it is the explanation corresponding to reality, very peculiar to the religious mentality. Anyway, confusing the unanimity of opinions with certainty is a common practice among rash religious.

In the case of the *Testimonium Flavianum* (the Testimony of Flavius Josephus) which we will analyze later, the conclusions about the problem of

its authenticity or not (total or partial) are so dubious that Fernando Bermejo-Rubio spoke of the “most diverse hypotheses that were presented and a conflicting situation that has not yet been resolved” and the “disturbing fact that the evidence can often be argued in *utramque partem* (in favor of either side)”. In addition, he called the *Testimonium Flavianum* problem a *quaestio vexata* - a controversial issue (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 327). Sometimes the dubiousness is so great that an author repeats the words hypothesis, conjectural, probable, hypothetical, certainty is not possible and other terms of uncertainty several times in a short span of just two pages (see: Van Voorst, 2000: 98-9). The issue is so controversial that Louis H. Fieldman listed and analyzed about eighty studies that discuss the problem of authenticity only from 1937 to 1980 (Fieldman, 1984: 679-703), and since then the discussion has not stopped.

In conclusion, strictly speaking, unanimity only increases the degree of possibility, that is, more unanimous ideas are only more likely to correspond to reality, but they do not mean that they are certainties. They rise in the range of possibilities, but they do not eliminate all improbabilities, such as irreversible certainty. As much as an opinion is unanimous, it remains a belief subject to correction or contestation. Certainty is different from belief and opinion, which is only achieved when all possibilities of controversies are eliminated, while belief and opinion still leave possibilities for controversies.

Very Important Subject, but with Few Data Sources

Some characters and facts from the past have reached such importance in the future without the prediction of contemporary authors to the events. That is, the authors recorded the facts without imagining the importance that they would reach in the following centuries, so they registered them in a superficial, imprecise, casual, catechetical and fictitious way, records that could not later be recognized as historical documents. An example is the set of the first Christian documents, the first followers who wrote about Jesus and the first Christians did not foresee the importance that Christianity would attain in the future, so they wrote vaguely without the careful documentary record, which is of little value for research current history.

The oldest Christian records are the letters of the apostle Paul, written in about 60 C.E. The oldest gospel, that of Mark, was written in the 70s C.E., the other three (Matthew, Luke and John), about 100 to 110 C.E. The autograph manuscripts of these compositions did not survive, what survived were handwritten copies of the later centuries. Therefore, we do not know how much has been changed and how much has been preserved during the handwritten reproduction process, even the oldest surviving codices, which are from the 4th and 5th centuries C.E. Furthermore, from the moment that Christianity reached religious importance, the process of doctrinal alteration of the Christian message in the manuscripts intensified, due to the

need to increase orthodox propaganda and combat heterodox ideas.

So, when something reaches enormous importance, for example: Christianity, the religion with the largest number of followers, but contemporary data about Jesus and the first Christians are scarce, what is built is a huge number of speculations and hypothetical theories, in an attempt to fill the scarcity of historical data. In this Christian literature of speculation and hypothesis, the very common dubious words are, perhaps, according to many, it may be, it is consensus, perhaps, as the majority, possibly, it could be, we could say that, etc. It has already been speculated so much about Jesus and early Christianity, that the number of books written on the subject would reach the size of a mountain. In short, the rule is as follows: the less data, the more speculation, the more data, the less speculation.

Comments and analyzes on the *Testimonium Flavianum* are no exception, the redactions are full of dubious words and phrases, such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph, so what we find is only more probable facts and more unanimous opinions, and rarely an assurance. The inexistence of Josephus' autograph manuscript only enabled the emergence of the speculative character of the studies.

Flavius Josephus

His baptismal name was Joseph ben Mattathias (37 - 100 C.E.), he assumed the Roman

name of Flavius Josephus after obtaining Roman citizenship, around 71 C.E., he lived and worked under the patronage of the Flavian emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian, residing in an apartment in the palace. He adopted the name of Flavius in honor of his Flavian patrons, a name by which he became known in posterity. His works were preserved and copied by the Romans, then by the Christians after the fall of Rome, so that he was repudiated by the Jewish community, for having assumed Roman citizenship, for having accepted the patronage of the Roman emperors and for having written in Greek, so, for almost all Jews, he was a traitor, so his works were not preserved by the Jews, nor commented on, in a way that his name was ignored in rabbinic literature. For, his two main works are understood as "a defense of the Romans and advice to the Jewish people to live peacefully under the power of the Romans" (Van Voorst, 2000: 82). However, he considered himself a loyal Jew.

His two main works are: *The War of the Jews*, which chronicles the Jewish revolt of 66-70 C.E., written between the years 75-80 C.E.; and *The Antiquity of the Jews*, written in the 90s C.E., which narrates in twenty books the history of the Jewish people from creation to the Jewish revolt (Whiston, 1857, volumes I and II), we will deal with the latter below, for it mentions Jesus in two passages, XVIII.03.03 (§63-4 - *Testimonium Flavianum*) and XX.09.01 (§200). Also, Christians became interested in copying the works of Josephus because they provide interesting information to Christians about important New Testament

characters, such as Jesus, John the Baptist (Ant. XVIII.05.02 - §116-9) and James, the brother of Jesus (Ant. XX.09.01 - §200).

Although despised and repudiated by many, some Jews nevertheless realized the value of Josephus' work, so a medieval Jewish book known as *Josippon* (*Sefer Yosippon*) was written, a Hebrew summary of Josephus, in which the latter author is widely quoted and used, attributed to *Joseph ben Gorion*. A book that has gone through several editions. Robert E. Van Voorst noted the curiosity that this Hebrew book “in its early versions, does not mention Jesus, late versions make brief and negative mentions of Jesus with materials extracted from *Talmud* and *Toledoth Yeshu*” (Van Voorst, 2000: 83n; to know more about *Josippon*, see: Dönitz, 2012: 953-70 and 2016: 382-9).

The *Testimonium Slavianum*

Before dealing with *Testimonium Flavianum*, let us talk about other passages that mention Jesus, but surrounded by strong accusations of interpolation by the researchers. For there are some passages in Russian and Romanian translations of *The War of the Jews*, known together as *Testimonium Slavianum* (Slavonic Testimony), in number of four passages, some extensive, where Jesus is mentioned and praised. The intention to exalt Jesus is blatant, as well as the anachronism, since these interpolations seek to resolve controversies that arose only after Josephus' death, pointing to the fact that they were added by

Christian copyists during the Middle Ages. Some interpolations are long, so we will not reproduce them in full here, just some curious passages. Because they are interpolations, these passages are not really testimonies, the name *Testimonium* was given by those who believe in their authenticities.

The passages interpolated in *The War of the Jews* named unscrupulously as *Testimonium Slavianum* are II.09.02 (§ 169), V.05.02 (§ 195), V.05.04 (§ 214) and VI.05.04 (§313). The beginning of the first passage, II.09.02, is a reproduction of the *Testimonium Flavianum* with praiseworthy additions to Jesus, to the point of claiming that he was such a fabulous miracle worker that he did not need to use his hands, only the word. At the end of the paragraph, Pilate is said to have acquitted Jesus in his verdict, declaring, "he (Jesus) is a benefactor, he is not a criminal, he is not a rebel and he does not seek any reign". So Pilate released him, as he had healed his wife when she was dying (Matthew, 27:19), which caused the wrath of the Jewish priests. Therefore, the latter gave Pilate money to be able to kill Jesus. He accepted the money and gave Jesus to the Jews, who then crucify him (Van Voorst, 2000: 86). This story is unknown in the canonical gospels and partly resembles the initial account in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*, also known as *Acts of Pilate* (Ehrman, 2011: 425s), probably a late interpolation that sought to acquit Pilate and increasingly accuse the Jews for the death of Jesus. Anyway, this interpolation is so divergent that it goes so far as to contradict the

canonical gospels themselves, stating that it was the Jews who crucified Jesus, and not the Romans. However, we know that the Jews did not crucify their criminals, crucifixion was a Roman practice.

In the next passage, V.05.02 (§ 195), the presence of an inscription, hung inside the temple, is mentioned, with the following wording, “Jesus, a king who never reigned, was crucified by the Jews because he foresaw the destruction of the city and the desolation of the temple” (Van Voorst, 2000: 87). Another attempt to blame the Jews for the death of Jesus, as well as to confirm that Jesus was indeed a prophet, by predicting the destruction of time, which happened in 70 C.E.. The canonical gospels do not mention this inscription.

The other passage, V.05.04 (§ 214), tries to resolve the old controversy about the resurrection or, quite the contrary, about the theft of Jesus' body in the tomb after his death, justifying that “it was not possible to steal it, because they had placed guards around their tomb - thirty Romans and a thousand Jews” (Van Voorst, 2000: 87). The attempt was to invent an exaggerated argument (thirty Romans and a thousand Jews) to discredit the possibility of the theft of Jesus' body after his death and, thus, to justify the phenomenon of the resurrection. These guards are not mentioned in the canonical gospels.

These passages do not appear in the Greek manuscripts of *The War of the Jews*, nor in the Latin translations and contemporary translations (see: Whiston, 1857: vol. II, 216, 328, 329 and 369 and Meier, 1991, vol. I, 62), therefore, only in Russian and Romanian translations, attesting that they are

interpolations of Christian copyists of the Orthodox Church during the Middle Ages. The opinion of almost all researchers is that these passages are not authentic.

***Testimonium Flavianum* as Proof or Not of Jesus' Historicity**

The passage from the work *The Antiquity of the Jews*, XVIII.03.03 (§63-4), received the name Testimony of Flavius Josephus because the Christians consider it a proof (testimony) of the historicity of Jesus, from an outside source of Christianity, therefore neutral, closer to the life of Jesus, that is, the 90s C.E.; if the passage is authentic, together with another passage XX.09.01 of the same work, in which Jesus is mentioned briefly like this "... the brother of Jesus, called the Christ, whose name was James ..." (Whiston, 1857: vol. II, 135), so the historicity of Jesus is confirmed by Josephus. This last passage is not so controversial, as most scholars understand that it is authentic, that is, it is not a Christian interpolation, whereas passage XVIII.63-4, known as *Testimonium Flavianum*, is warmly and endlessly discussed, as we will see next.

Jesus was a very common name at that time. The reason why Jesus is mentioned as Ἰησοῦ του λεγομένου Χρίστου - *Iesou tou legomenou Christou* "Jesus, called the Christ" in *Antiquity of the Jews* XX.09.01 is not complimentary, but Josephus' need to differentiate the various "Jesuses" mentioned in the work, there are at least fourteen:

Jesus, the son of *Sapphias*; Jesus, the son of *Gamala*; Jesus, the governor; Jesus, the brother of John; Jesus, the brother of *Onias*; Jesus the son of *Phabet*; Jesus, the son of *Sie*; Jesus, the son of *Damneus* (mentioned in the following paragraph - XX.09.02); Jesus, the son of *Gamaliel*; Jesus, the son of *Josadek* and others (Whiston, 1857: *passim*). Some researchers point to the mention of twenty “Jesuses” in *The Antiquity of the Jews*. Therefore, the specification “Jesus, called Christ” is not a complimentary interpolation added later by Christians, in order to exalt Jesus, as some authors note, but rather a way of differentiating the many characters with the name of Jesus in the work.

Of the ancient works that survived destruction by Christians in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, we do not find works that distrust the historicity of Jesus or polemic the issue. Therefore, what it seems today is that the subject was not treated or discussed in Antiquity, that is, no one suspected the historicity of Jesus in the years that followed his life. The divergences at the beginning were as to the details of his life and the nature of his teachings. That is the reason why about fifty different gospels have already been found, in full or in fragments (Robinson, 1990 and Ehrman, 2011). Then, suspicion about the historicity of Jesus remained untouched for many centuries, until the first discussions in the sixteenth century and beyond. In the 20th century, the subject heated up and then projects such as *In Search of the Historical Jesus* emerged. Some contestants of the historicity of Jesus have become known: George Albert Wells,

Earl Doherty and Robert M. Price are some of them. To learn about a recent study on the debate on the historicity of Jesus, a comprehensive and recommended work is *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, by Bart D. Ehrman, an author who defends historicity. In this work, he reviews the main arguments of the opposite authors, which he calls “mythicists”, that is, those who argue that Jesus' account is a myth, and then present his arguments in favor of historicity (Ehrman, 2012).

In this discussion of the historicity of Jesus, the paragraph *Testimonium Flavianum* was perhaps the most widely used evidence in favor of historicity, which is why it appears in almost all works that discuss the issue, as it deals with the mention of Jesus closest to his life, that is, 90s C.E., as well as being written by an author from outside Christianity (Josephus was a Jew). So that, Christians defend the authenticity of the paragraph, while mythicists argue that the paragraph is an interpolation by Christian hands. Finally, the *Testimonium Flavianum* had, and still has, a central role in the discussion about the historicity of Jesus.

To summarize in a very condensed way, when we analyze the arguments in favor and the arguments against the historicity of Jesus, the tendency seems to lean more towards the argument in favor, that is, it is more likely that Jesus existed than he did not exist. This is the opinion of most historians. Now, the intriguing question is to know what is history and what is fiction in the accounts of his life and his sayings, that is, to separate the

historical Jesus from the mythological Jesus, this is the great challenge to be overcome.

The *Testimonium Flavianum*

This controversial passage (paragraph) in *The Antiquity of the Jews* XVIII.03.03 (§ 63-4) is more commonly translated like this (*Textus Receptus*):

Around this time, Jesus (Ἰησοῦς-*Yesous*) lived, a wise man, if in fact it is correct to call him a man. For he was an author of impressive acts and a teacher of the people who gladly accepts the truth. He converted both many Jews and many Greeks. He was the Christ (Χριστός). When Pilate heard about him, accused by the leading men among us, he condemned him to the cross, but those who had loved him at the beginning did not cease to love him. For, on the third day, he appeared to them alive again, because the divine prophets had prophesied these and thousands of other things about him. To this day, the tribe of Christians named after him has not disappeared" (Whiston, 1857, vol. II, 70; Meier, 1991: vol. I, 60; Van Voorst, 2000: 84-5; Mason, 2003: 226-7 and a translation more literal in Hopper, 2014: 149-50).

The study of this paragraph poses one of the oldest and most difficult problems in historical

research on Christian origins. The first and crucial problem is that Josephus' autograph manuscript was not preserved, therefore, from the surviving manuscripts of *The Antiquity of the Jews*, corresponding to books IX to XX, the oldest is from the 9th or 10th century, known as *Codex Palatinus - Vaticanus - Graecus 14*, in parchment, at the Vatican Library in Rome (for more details, see: Leoni, 2014: 311-4). Therefore, it is not possible to know how much has been altered, omitted or preserved in the process of manuscript reproduction from the first century until the oldest surviving manuscripts, so that the Textual Criticism cannot be of assistance in this case. This is a point that weighs heavily in favor of those who think that this paragraph is in total an interpolation or that it originally existed, but was interspersed with additions of praise by Christian copyists.

The strongest argument in favor of the total interpolation of this passage, that is, that it did not exist in the first manuscripts or that it did, but reproduced a negative assessment of Jesus and Christianity, is as follows. "The passage appears in all manuscripts (survivors), but a considerable number of Christian writers: *Pseudo-Justinus* and *Theophilus* in the second century, *Minucio Felix*, *Irineu*, *Clement of Alexandria*, *Julio African*, *Tertullian*, *Hippolytus* and *Origen* in the third century, *Methodius* and *Pseudo-Eustace* at the beginning of the fourth century, who knew Josephus and cited his works, do not mention this passage, although one would imagine that this passage would be the first that a Christian apologist would

quote. In particular *Origen* (*Contra Celsum*, 1.47 and in the *Commentary of Matthew* 10.17), who certainly knew the eighteenth book of *The Antiquity of the Jews* and quotes five passages from it, explicitly states that Josephus did not believe in Jesus as Christ. The first to quote the *Testimonium Flavianum* is Eusebius (c. 324 C.E.), and even after him, we can see, there are eleven Christian writers who quote Josephus, but do not quote the *Testimonium*. In fact, it is not until *Jerome*, in the 5th century, that we find another reference to the *Testimonium*" (Hooper, 2014: 151; for more details, see: Mason, 2003: 229-31).

Now, if *Origen* (185-254 C.E.) stated that Josephus did not believe that Jesus was the Christ, then, according to those who distrust the originality of this paragraph, the phrase "He was the Christ" (ὁ Χριστός οὗτος ἦν - ὁ *Christós oútos én*), did not exist in the first manuscripts, or had another wording, perhaps hostile to Jesus, so it was interpolated later, along with other laudatory additions. The fact that so many of the early Christian writers, eager for praiseworthy mentions of Christianity outside of Christian tradition, do not quote this passage is really puzzling. The explanation of those who suspect interpolation is that Eusebius was the first to have access to an interpolated manuscript, while the authors, who wrote right after him, only knew the manuscripts without the interpolation, or were suspicious of the interpolation, so they preferred to ignore it. That is, the insertion of the interpolation must have happened little by little in the manuscripts, therefore,

in the first centuries of Christianity, Josephus' manuscripts that already included the interpolation and those that did not include it, should circulate simultaneously, therefore, from the century IV C.E., some authors (Eusebius and Jerome) mentioned the interpolated passage, while others did not. In the following centuries, with the strengthening of Christianity in the Middle Ages, all manuscripts that did not have interpolation were destroyed, thus surviving only those that were interpolated, so today we only have altered manuscripts. Ken Olsen, on the other hand, argued, "The most likely hypothesis is that Eusebius either composed the entire text or rewrote it so completely that it is now impossible to recover the original Josephus" (Olsen, 2013: 100 and *passim*; see also: Mason, 2003: 232). However, Bart Ehrman, who was professor of Ken Olsen, disagreed: "There is really little in the *Testimonium* that is more eusebian than Josephus, and much of the passage is actually written as if it were written by Josephus" (Ehrman, 2012: 56-7). This is a hypothesis that is still under discussion.

All Latin translation manuscripts include the interpolated text of the Greek *Testimonium* (*textus receptus*), the oldest being from the 6th century C.E., therefore older than the oldest surviving Greek manuscript (9th or 10th century C.E.). The Arabic and Syrian translations were analyzed by Schlomo Pines and Alice Whealey respectively. A curiosity in these translations is that the phrase in the Greek *textus receptus* "he was the Christ" is translated as "he was perhaps the Christ" in the Arabic translation of *Agapius* (Bishop of Hierapolis, 10th century C.E.),

and in the Syrian translation of Michael the Sirius (patriarch of Antioch from 1166 to 1199 C.E.) the phrase was translated as "Jesus was believed to be the Messiah" (Whealey, 2008: 573, 580 and 587-8). In this same sense, it also appears in the Latin translation of the *Testimonium* by Jerome, translated from the work of Eusebius of Caesarea (Mason, 2003: 230). In the passage from the Greek *Testimonium* "on the third day, he (Jesus) appeared to them (disciples) alive again ..." written with conviction about the resurrection by Josephus, the same passage is translated with less conviction by Josephus, in the Arabic translation of *Agapius*, as it is translated as an account of the disciples and not as a certainty of Josephus: "They (the disciples) reported that he (Jesus) had appeared to them three days after the crucifixion and that he was alive ..." (Whealey, 2008: 574 and *passim*).

The Three Hypotheses as to the Authenticity or Not of the *Testimonium Flavianum*

1st hypothesis: The passage is completely authentic

2nd hypothesis: The passage is completely inauthentic

3rd hypothesis: The passage is partially authentic and partially inauthentic.

Most scholars today understand that the third hypothesis is the most likely, only a small number defend the first hypothesis, while mythicists claim that the second hypothesis is the correct one, since Jesus' story is a myth, so the Christian priests

were those who added the paragraph in order to establish the historicity of Jesus. We will now analyze each of them.

1st) The Hypothesis that the Passage is Completely Authentic

It will be analyzed here only some of the arguments most used by defenders of authenticity. They argue that the complimentary phrase "a wise man" (σοφός ἀνὴρ - *sophós anér*), right at the beginning of the paragraph, does not correspond to a Christian language, so it cannot be an interpolation, but by Josephus, as it matches with his style, since the latter praises Solomon (Ant. VIII.02.07 - § 53) and Daniel (Ant. X.11.02 - § 237), as well as calls John the Baptist "a good man" (Ant. XVIII.05.02 - § 116). The defenders of this argument understand that a Christian would not call Jesus "a wise man", because it is a small compliment to Jesus, the most likely would be to call him "the Son of God" or "the Savior".

What will be explained next is not just for this argument, but for many of the arguments of other authors, whose references for analyzing the meaning of Christianity and the Christian language are based only on the canonical gospels. Obviously, those who read the latter clearly perceive that in them Jesus is much more a savior or a miracle worker than a "wise man". However, this is not the case in all gospels. In some Gnostic gospels, Jesus is more a sage than a miracle worker or a savior, especially in *Gospel of Thomas*, whose content is

formed only by Jesus' teachings (Robinson, 1990: 124-38 and Ehrman, 2011: 303-49). These interpretations may have circulated orally for a long time before their written compositions (Van Voorst, 2000: 102).

Rather, it is necessary to remember that Flavius Josephus published *The Antiquity of the Jews* in the early years of the 90s C.E., therefore, some of the gospels, which would later become canonical, had been recently composed (between 60 and 110 C.E., according to the most accepted suggestions today), and we have no evidence that they had the same wording and content, as well as the same style and refinement, such as the wording of the current gospels. Josephus did not cite the sources from which he obtained information about Jesus and Christianity. Furthermore, Christian manuscripts at that time were certainly very few, since among the early Christians, few were literate. So, most likely, information about Jesus and Christianity was obtained through oral information, at a time when the first Christian sects followed gospels of different origins. The sectarian divisions were not yet rigorously consolidated, the teachings were, in the majority, transmitted orally, through preaching, where interpretations and languages of different currents, that later would become rivals, were mixed in a single preaching.

Unsure of his position, Robert E. Van Voorst assumed that "the most plausible hypothesis is that Josephus gained his knowledge of Christianity when he lived in Palestine. (...) Whether Josephus acquired his information through direct encounters

with Christians, through indirect information from others about the Christian movement, or some combination of both, we cannot say. John Meier is correct in concluding that none of these potential sources are verifiable, yet the evidence points to the latter option as the most recommended" (Van Voorst, 2000: 103).

Therefore, it is unreliable to use only the canonical gospels as a source to analyze Josephus' ideas about Jesus and Christianity. He lived at a time when the process of canonizing doctrines and rites was not yet developed in the respective Christian sects. If he obtained it orally, it may have been from Christians who mixed sermons from different sources. Bart D. Ehrman noted: "There is nothing to suggest that Josephus had actually read the Gospels (he almost certainly did not), or that he did any kind of primary research on the life of Jesus, examining the Roman records (there was no record) ..." and "...there were stories about Jesus circulating in Palestine around the first century and much earlier" (Ehrman, 2012: 57-8). In addition, the canonical gospels, as they are today, have undergone countless revisions, corrections, refinements and editions, so they cannot have exactly the same wording, the same stylistic, the same refinement and the same content as the first compositions of the time of Josephus. Finally, the canonical gospels as a reference base for analyzing the content and style of Christian language of that time, by current scholars, are unlikely examples of reliability (examples: Meier, 1991: vol. I, 60-9 and *passim*; and Van Voorst , 2000: 102).

A curious example of how the canonical gospels must have been altered in their wording is in the textual differences when comparing the thousands of manuscripts. Textual critics point to the existence of thousands of textual differences. Another curious difference, which confirms the evolution of the linguistic style and refinement of the refined wording found in the current Canonical Gospels, is in the comparison with the simpler and more coarse wording of the Apocryphal Gospels, which did not go through the revisions and touches of refinement in the writing, during the long process of manuscript reproduction, from Antiquity to the Contemporary Age, as was possible for canonical manuscripts. For example, the *Nag Hammadi* Library manuscripts were buried for about fifteen centuries, so they did not undergo revisions and refinements in the writing, which was discovered in 1945. Therefore, when we compare the language styles of both collections, we clearly notice the difference of the rustic language of the Gnostic texts to the refinement of the language of the canonical texts. This refinement is further enhanced when canonical texts are translated into contemporary languages, often in order to cover up textual problems in the original languages (Hebrew, Greek and Latin), or politically inconvenient meanings for churches.

Another controversial complimentary sentence argued in favor of authenticity, by the defenders of the originality of the *Testimonium*, is the one that states that Jesus was “an author of impressive acts” (παραδόξων έργων ποιητής -

paradoxon érgon poietés), it should not be an interpolation, as it seems like a statement by someone outside Christianity. The claim is that Jesus was known as an “author of impressive acts”, hence the reproduction of his reputation here. However, it is a phrase with a strange translation, since the word *poietés* (ποιητής) also means “poet” and the word *paradoxon* also means “strangers” or “paradoxical”. Ken Olsen claimed that the combination of the Greek words ποιέω - *poiéo* (poet) and παράδοξος - *paradoxes*, to mean “author of impressive acts”, is extremely common in the works of Eusebius of Caesarea, as it occurs more than a hundred times. In addition, Josephus does not use this combination of words in other passages of his works, nor the word *poietés* in the sense of “author” or “director”, instead of the sense of “poet” (Olsen, 2013: 103). Steve Mason argued that Josephus used the word ποιητής (*poietés*) in the sense of poet nine times in other passages, including a reference to Homer, so its use is not characteristic of Josephus (Mason, 2003: 231).

While the phrase “a master of people who accept the truth with pleasure” (διδάσκαλος ἀνθρώπων των ἡδονη τάληθή δεχομένων - *didáskalos anthrópon ton edoné tálethe dexoménon*) is very strange for a Christian to be an interpolation, for Christian authors avoid the word “pleasure” (ἡδονή - *edoné*), so it is difficult to imagine a Christian using these words.

The complimentary claim that Jesus “converted many Jews and many Greeks”; (πολλοὺς μεν Ἰουδαίους, πολλοὺς δέ καί του

Ελληνικού ἐπηγάγετο - *polloús men loudaíous, polloús dé kaí tou Ellenikou épegágeto*) is a misunderstood, since as we know from history, at the time of Josephus, Christianity still had few Jewish and Greek followers. A Christian would hardly make such a mistake, so the phrase cannot be a Christian interpolation.

Finally, the word "tribe" (φῦλον - *fulon*), for the name of Jesus' followers, is too strange to be from the hand of a Christian, it can only be that of someone outside Christianity.

Many of the authors who defend the complete authenticity of the *Testimonium* are Christians, theologians or professors of religion at universities, therefore authors who, due to their religious background, are used to understanding the New Testament as a historical document in its entirety, which for historians do not proceed. That is why they take as reference the canonical texts of the NT for the knowledge of Christian life and culture of the first century, which is still doubtful, due to the absence of truly historical documents, which deal with Jesus and the beginning of Christianity, which are contemporaries. Finally, the New Testament is not a historical document in its entirety, more precisely, a religious text that intersperses history, fiction, praise, dramatization and preaching.

2nd) The Hypothesis that the Passage is Completely Inauthentic

In addition to the most common argument for the inauthenticity of the *Testimonium*, pointed out in

the fact that it is not mentioned by Christian authors before Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century C.E.), even though they were all familiar with the work of Josephus, other arguments against complete originality are presented.

A very common accusation is that the *Testimonium* paragraph interrupts a chain of themes and then, in the next paragraph, goes back to the previous theme, that is, the *Testimonium* does not fit well in the context of book XVIII of the work *The Antiquity of the Jews*, in short, it is a paragraph out of context, since Josephus is talking about revolts and turmoil, and then he interrupts to tell about Jesus and Christianity with a praising paragraph. More specifically, chapter 03 of book XVIII deals with the Jewish revolt against the transfer of the Roman army from Caesarea to Jerusalem, bringing effigies of Caesar on their standards, which was against Jewish law, whose display of images is prohibited. Then it deals with the revolt against the construction of a pipeline to bring running water to Jerusalem, with money that the Jews considered sacred. Then, after these tumultuous events, even with the occurrence of deaths, the paragraph of the *Testimonium Flavianum* interrupts these themes to abruptly introduce a praising text to Jesus and Christianity and then, in the next paragraph, to resume the theme about another turmoil that occurred in the temple of Isis in Rome. This next paragraph begins with words that point to the meaning that makes the previous paragraph (the *Testimonium*) seem like an interpolation: "At about the same time, too, a sad

calamity put the Jews in disarray ...", that is, takes up the theme of calamities that the previous paragraph the *Testimonium*, interrupted (Whiston, 1857: vol. II, 69-70 and for analysis, see: Mason, 2003: 227). Finally, for the defenders of inauthenticity, the entire paragraph of the *Testimonium* is a flagrant of Christian interpolation due to its interrupting character.

Very problematic is the phrase "if it is actually correct to call him a man" (εἰγε ἄνδρα αὐτόν λέγειν χρή - *eige andra autón légein chré*), it is very complimentary to be written by Josephus. The interpolator's intention was to warn that Jesus was more than a man. Also, very suspicious is the long sentence: "on the third day, he appeared to them alive again, because the divine prophets had prophesied these and thousands of other things about him", the message seems more like a confession of faith in the resurrection and in the messianic role of Jesus, by a Christian, than the account of a Jewish historian. The phrase is full of particularly Christian content and sounds like a propaganda.

Even more problematic is the phrase "He was the Christ" (ὁ Χριστός οὗτος ἦν - *ó Christós oútos én*), due to the use of the word Christ (*Christós*), an ancient Greek adjective that, most probably, did not have at the time of Josephus, the meaning it acquired from the growth of Christianity. Before the appropriation of the word by Christians, it meant for the Greeks "scraped", "polished" or "wet", "sprinkled", because it derives from the verb χρίω (*chrío*), which means "to scrape", "to shine",

only later, with the influence of Christianity, it acquired the meaning of "anointing". Therefore, Josephus could not have used the Greek word *Christós*, since the Greek reader would not understand it in the sense of Messiah (the Anointed One), translated from the Hebrew word *mashiach* (anointed, consecrated), that is, it would have a special meaning only for the Jewish public. In the Jewish community, this word was very significant, since anointing was the means by which kings and high priests were made official in their offices. The act of pouring oil over their heads represented the appropriation of God-given authority (Exodus, 29.07 and 1 Samuel, 10.01). Therefore, for the Greek reader, who did not know the Jewish tradition, the phrase "he was the Christ" would be understood as "he was the wet one", or "he was the sprinkled", or "he was the polished", since the ancient Greek word *Christós* (Christ) was not yet known as a proper name in the Greek world at the time of Josephus. Therefore, if Josephus had used the word Christ, he would have had to explain to the Greek reader what it meant in the Jewish world, but he did not, hence the suspicion that this phrase is a Christian interpolation.

Another problem with the phrase "He was the Christ" is that it sounds strongly like a personal confession of faith by Josephus who, on the contrary, was not a Christian, but a Jew. As it is, it means that Josephus confessed that he believed that Jesus was the Messiah, which would not be said by a Jew. We have already mentioned above that, in some translations into Latin, Arabic and

Syrian, this phrase was translated in order to exempt the confession of faith, such as: "He was perhaps the Christ" (Arabic translation) or "He was believed to be the Christ" (Syrian translation of Michael the Syrian and the Latin translation of Jerome). Anyway, only a Christian would proclaim a sentence in this way. Furthermore, if this phrase had been present in the autograph manuscript (1st century C.E.), certainly the first Christians who cited Josephus, eager for praise for Jesus, would have used it as an additional asset to consolidate Jesus as the Christ, above all because it originated from the mouth of a Jew.

As already mentioned, the absence of this phrase in the first manuscripts is confirmed by the clear statements by the heresiologist Origen (3rd century C.E.) that Josephus "did not accept that our Jesus is the Christ" (*Commentary on Matthew* 10:17). Likewise, in his work *Against Celsum* (01.47), he lamented that Josephus "did not believe in Jesus as the Christ". Origen knew Josephus' works very well, as he quoted in detail the books *The War of the Jews*, *The Antiquity of the Jews* and *Against Apion* (Mason, 2003: 229). Evidently, Origen's copy of *The Antiquity of the Jews*, before his eyes, did not have this phrase or did not have the entire *Testimonium*.

The first author to quote the *Testimonium* was Eusebius of Caesarea (4th century C.E.). In the first volume of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius often mentions Josephus as an independent witness to the Gospel statements about Jesus, John the Baptist and the political events of the time.

Unlike previous authors, Eusebius quoted the *Testimonium* exactly as it appears in the current Greek manuscripts of the *Testimonium* (*Ecclesiastical History* 1.11). Another work by Eusebius, *Theophany*, which survived only in the Syrian version, also includes a "*Witness to Jesus of Josephus*". However, interestingly, a third work includes the *Testimonium*, but with variations in the language (*Demonstration of the Gospel* 3.05.105-6). These variations seem to indicate that, even at the time of Eusebius (4th century C.E.); the wording of the *Testimonium* was not yet uniformly fixed. In addition, Eusebius put the *Testimonium* after Josephus' discussion of John the Baptist, and, in the order we find in current Greek manuscripts, the order is the opposite, that is, the *Testimonium* first (XVIII. 03.03 - § 63-4) and then the discussion on John the Baptist (XVIII.05.02 - § 116-9 - Mason, 2003: 230 and Van Voorst, 2000: 97).

Another suspicion of inauthenticity is the fact that the Latin translations, the Arabic translation by Agapius and the Syrian translation by Michael do not exactly match the content of the current Greek manuscripts of the *Testimonium*. Steve Mason noted, "It seems likely, however, that versions of Josephus' statements by Jerome, Agapius and Michael reflect Josephus' alternative textual traditions, which lacked the emphatic statements that we find in the (medieval) manuscripts of *The Antiquity of the Jews* or in the works of Eusebius" (Mason, 2003: 231).

Proponents of this hypothesis claim that the reason for the complete interpolation of the

Testimonium Flavianum, in the work *The Antiquity of the Jews* by Christian copyists, lies in the fact that, driven by a strong pride for Christianity, they did not support the short and insignificant mention of Jesus as just the brother of James, in Book XX, in this extensive and imposing work of Josephus. That is, they felt that Jesus had been despised in the history of the Jews. Also, the fact that John the Baptist is dealt with in a relatively long passage (XVIII.05.02 - § 116-9) and Jesus only mentioned briefly, leaving the idea that John the Baptist was more important than Jesus in Jewish history. Then, they were led to create an interpolating paragraph that reported Jesus praisingly, right in the passage that deals with Pilate's mandate (Book XVIII), hence a praising paragraph was interpolated (§ 63-4), even though through an awkward interruptive way, as we saw before.

3rd) The Hypothesis that the Passage is Partially Authentic and Partly Inauthentic

John P. Meier listed three passages in the *Testimonium* that call attention for their particularly Christian character, so they are suspicious passages of interpolations:

- 1) "If in fact it is correct to call him a man"
- 2) "He was the Christ"
- 3) "On the third day, he appeared to them alive again, because the divine prophets had prophesied these and thousands of other things about him" (Meier, 1991: vol. I, 60-1).

So, when we read, without further examination, the Arabic translation of *Agapius*, it conveys to us the idea that it eliminates or minimizes the Christian praise of the above three sentences:

“At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good, and [he] was known to be virtuous. In addition, many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. However, those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders” (Mason, 2003: 230).

For Steve Mason, this Arabic version eliminates all the difficulties found in the Greek text of the *Testimonium* (*Textus Receptus*), because this version:

- a) is content to call Jesus just ‘a wise man’
- b) does not mention Jesus' miracles
- c) Pilate's execution of Jesus is discreet
- d) the appearance of Jesus after death is merely an account of the disciples, and not a fact
- e) Josephus' surprise about Jesus as the Messiah
- f) the claim that the prophets spoke of the Messiah, whoever he may be, not that he is Jesus.

He concluded, “the *Agapius* version of the *Testimonium* sounds like something that a late-

century Jewish observer could have written about Jesus and his followers” (Mason, 2003: 234).

Thus, it would appear that this version could be the original Josephus of the *Testimonium*, as it retains the passages that could be authentic and eliminates the suspicious passages that would be inauthentic. However, for many scholars this is not enough, since the debate is much more heated and much more diverse. Therefore, instead of this, most researchers suggest a restoration of the text of the Greek *Testimonium*. This restoration, which some authors call reconstruction, is divided into two models:

- a) the depreciative model and
- b) the neutral model.

a) The Depreciative Model

This is defended by authors who believe that what Josephus originally wrote was a depreciation of Jesus, so the early Christian authors avoided mentioning it. A strong argument of the defenders of this hypothesis is that this model fits more perfectly in the context of paragraph 63-4 of book XVIII, when Josephus is dealing with revolts, turmoil and calamities, while criticizing some evildoers of the time. We reproduce below the derogatory restoration according to the proposal of Robert E. Van Voorst (2000: 94):

“Now there arose about this time a source of further trouble in one Jesus, a wise man who performed surprising works, a teacher of men who gladly welcome strange things. He

led away many Jews, and many Gentiles. He was the so-called Christ. When Pilate, acting on information supplied by the chief men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had attached themselves to him at first did not cease to cause trouble. The tribe of Christians, which has taken its name from him, is not extinct even today".

Robert E. Van Voorst suggested that this paragraph could be interpreted in an even more derogatory way. For example, in the expression "wise man", Josephus could be trying to say "smart man, manipulator", also, "surprising works", it could mean "controversial works or works that cause perplexity". The phrase "a source of further trouble in a Jesus" could be interpreted as that Jesus was leading a rebellion, since this paragraph is inserted in the middle of Josephus' reports of rebellions. The phrases "with pleasure" in the Greek *Testimonium* (*Textus Receptus*) and "strange things" in derogatory restoration could mean "with idiotic pleasure". The last statement "to this day the tribe of Christians, named according to him, has not disappeared", in the *Testimonium*, could mean Josephus' lament for the survival of Christianity until his time (Ibid: 94).

Because of the orthographic similarities, some proponents of the derogatory hypothesis suggested that Christian copyists could have changed hostile expressions into praiseworthy ones. For example, the Greek expression in the *Testimonium* σοφός ἀνὴρ - *sophós ánér* (a wise

man) could be in Josephus' original as σοφιστής καὶ γόης ἀνὴρ - *sofistés kai góes ánér* (a sophist and a deceiver). In addition, that the Greek word τάληθῆ - *táleté*, (true things) was originally τήθη - *táété* (unusual, strange things), so the phrase in the *Testimonium* would be like this: "a master of the people who accepts strange things with pleasure". In addition, the phrase "He converted both many Jews and many Greeks" could be the original "He misled both many Jews and many Greeks" (Ibid: 95).

This derogatory model reminds us of hostile accounts of Jesus by Jews in the early centuries of Christianity, which were later recorded in Talmud and *Sepher Toledoth Yeshu* collection. For the hostile versions of Jesus' life, see Botelho, 2016a and 2016b. This is a position defended by a smaller number of researchers, the majority defending the possibility that the neutral restoration is the original.

b) The Neutral Model

This is the hypothesis pointed out by the majority as the most probable. Its superiority over the derogatory proposal was vehemently defended by Robert E. Van Voorst (2000: 95-9). Fernando Bermejo-Rubio contested each of R. E. Van Voorst's seven arguments, arguing that they are not as well founded as believed (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 331-65). In Robert E. Van Voorst's neutral proposal, Josephus's original would look like this:

“Around this time lived Jesus, a wise man.
For he was a worker of amazing deeds and

was a teacher of people who gladly accept the truth. He won over both many Jews and many Greeks. Pilate, when he heard him accused by the leading men among us, condemned him to the cross, [but] those who had first loved him did not cease [doing so]. To this day the tribe of Christians named after him has not disappeared" (Van Voorst, 2000: 93).

This restoration is almost literally identical to the neutral proposal by John P. Meier (1991: 61). As this paragraph has been reconstructed, readers may think that it is more apologetic than neutral, due to exalting phrases such as: "a wise man", "worker of amazing deeds", "a teacher of people who gladly accept the truth", "he won over both many Jews and many Greeks" and "to this day, the tribe of Christians (...) has not disappeared". R. E. Van Voorst justified it as follows: "At the end of the first century, Christians were using highly praising language about Jesus (the Son of God, the Lord, the Savior, etc.), at least some Jews were using language strongly derogatory about him (deceiver, magician, etc.) and the Romans were also using derogatory epithets such as "instigator". Seen in the face of this *spectrum*, the reconstructed *Testimonium* does not seem to be committed to Jesus. It could have been written by a Jew neutral to Jesus, but not by a Christian or a Roman" (Van Voorst, 2000: 93-4). What Van Voorst wanted to justify is that, if it had been written by a Christian, the praise would have been much higher, and if it

had been written by an antagonistic Jew, it would be fraught with hostilities. Therefore, to him, the paragraph looks like a neutral text.

Well, the justification is only probable, since, as we mentioned before, it is difficult to know exactly which language was used by each Christian sect or by each opponent of Christianity at that time, there was certainly no uniformity of language and thought among the fledgling Christian sects, as well as among groups of opponents to emerging Christianity. For, trying to assume the exact nature of the language used by different peoples and groups in different languages about Jesus and Christianity, based only on scarce amount of texts remaining from that time is more an exercise in guesswork than the presentation of a hypothesis. Taking as a reference only the few remaining written texts is not enough to accurately know the language in its diversity, since, at that time, communication was more oral than written, due to the large number of illiterates, especially among Christians. Thus, Josephus may have known about Jesus and Christianity more orally than through reading.

Robert E. Van Voorst himself recognized that both restorations (reconstructions) are hypothetical, he only argued that the neutral reconstruction is more likely to be Josephus' original: "Although certainty is not possible, even because both reconstructions remain forever hypothetical , seven main reasons can be put forward to argue that neutral reconstruction is the best explanation of this difficult passage. None of

them have conclusive value in their own right ...” (Van Voorst, 2000: 95). Fernando Bermejo-Rubio contested each of these seven reasons. I will deal with each of them below.

The Seven Reasons for the Most Probable Originality of Neutral Reconstruction

1st reason: R. E. Van Voorst initially argued that the neutral reconstruction “explains why we have some mention of Jesus in the work of Josephus”. In this author's view, if Christian copyists had found a derogatory reference to Jesus, they would have deleted the entire paragraph, rather than just mending it, as they would feel that the entire paragraph was an embarrassment to Christianity. Therefore, copyists would be more willing to amend a neutral text than a derogatory text, so they added praise in the then neutral paragraph, hence the praiseworthy *Testimonium* we have today. Another argument is that if the original reproduced a derogatory view, Christians would not have given as much importance to the works of Josephus, with which they would not have reproduced so many handwritten copies, and we know that the books of Josephus were highly esteemed by the priests (Van Voorst, 2000: 95-6).

Now, a curiosity is the fact that, if the original was a derogatory text, why do not we have even a single author from Antiquity denouncing the insults? One answer could be that all the texts that pointed out the offenses were all destroyed in the following years, by the Church's censorship, when the

interpolated text of the *Testimonium* became universally accepted.

Disputation: Fernando Bermejo-Rubio commented that the reason above is “an unjustified assumption”, since it is not possible to be sure about the extent and degree of hostility mentioned in the original text. Perhaps the latter was not as hostile, as the proponents of this hypothesis propose and, at the same time, neither as praising as the existing proposal. In addition, he contested the hypothesis that the neutral reconstruction “explains why we have any mention of Jesus in the work *The Antiquities of Jews*” (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 331).

Considering that the original was a derogatory text, the justification for Christians not to get rid of this work may be in the fact that many, at that time, perceived in Jesus a rebel who proclaimed messianic allegations, inflamed the people and was crucified as a criminal by the Roman leader. In other words, they confused a spiritual message with a political message. For these early Christians, Josephus would have drawn his views on Jesus from sources that spread a misunderstood Christian message. The insults about Jesus were the result of a misunderstanding. In the words of F. Bermejo-Rubio, the early Christians “felt that the view of a rebellious Jesus was the result of the tragic misinterpretation of a purely spiritual message” (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 333), so they didn't care so much in discarding the paragraph with derogatory opinions about Jesus, then, instead, they changed it with praising opinions.

In the conclusion of this author: "In this light, we can better understand that Christian readers and copyists would not have felt obliged to discard the passage *tout court*, even less the valuable work of Josephus" (ibid: 333). Because of the high value of the work of Josephus, the early Christians found it more advantageous to enjoy the work of Josephus than to discard it, due to the mentions, in addition to Jesus, to John the Baptist, James brother of Jesus and other Christian characters. Then, due to its precious historical value, they decided to change the paragraph that mentions Jesus with praise and, with that, to keep the work as a Christian propaganda.

2nd reason: Van Voorst argued that the text of the neutral reconstruction flows as evenly as the derogatory reconstruction after the removal of the three interpolated sentences. He also argued that the phrase "He was the Christ" can be removed as an interpolation, since the final phrase "the tribe of Christians named after his name" already identifies Jesus as Christ, therefore repetition is unnecessary (Van Voorst, 2000: 96).

Disputation: F. Bermejo-Rubio initially objected claiming that the fluency argument does not indicate the superiority of the neutral reconstruction text over derogatory reconstruction, "it is only as good as the other" (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 333). The author also argued that the removal of the phrase "He was the Christ" is problematic, because if this phrase were removed, the justification for the crucifixion would not appear. In John Baptist's description, Josephus

clearly indicates Antipas's motives for beheading, defended the maintenance of the reference to Christ in the original text, because it can be "a positive statement contesting the belief in Jesus as Messiah is the best explanation for this fact." The use of the verb in the past ἦν - *én* (was) in the phrase ὁ Χριστός οὗτος ἦν - *ó Christós oútos én* (He was the Christ) can be a kind of *adversarium*, that is, a statement that, in fact, intends to affirm the opposite, something like: "He was the Christ", but only for the your followers and not for us, or "He was the Christ", but he is no longer. This author concluded by stating that, "one has the strong impression that Josephus wrote at least a little more than what has survived" (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 335-6).

Reason 3: Neutral reconstruction is better harmonized than derogatory reconstruction, with the last reference to Jesus in the passage later (XX § 200), "Jesus, who is called the Christ". This second passage mentioning Jesus is universally recognized as authentic, it is a passage with a discreet and brief reference about Jesus, enough, since the most extensive description has already been made earlier in the passage from the *Testimonium*, XVIII § 63-4 (Van Voorst, 2000: 96-7).

Disputation: The counter-argument is that, in studying the reference to Jesus in passage XX § 200, researchers, because of their strong admiration for Jesus, than for any other character, attach more importance to the mention of Jesus

than the other characters in the episode (James, *Ananus*, *Albinus* and *Agrippa II*). That is, they transform Jesus into a protagonist in a passage where he is only mentioned in passing. F. Bermejo-Rubio observed “the reference to Jesus is only *en passant* (in passing), as the focus of the subject is James and *Ananus*”, and concluded: “It must be obvious that a writer could have a derogatory view of a person without having to make a critical description every time you mention him” (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 336-7). The reference του λεγομένου - *tou legoménou* (from the known) does not allow us to extract any significant deduction. Anyway, Josephus did not feel the need to repeat his disparaging opinions about Jesus in passage XX § 200 of *The Antiquity of the Jews*.

Reason 4: Neutral reconstruction, which removes pro-Christian interpolations, makes sense for the fact that early Christian writers did not mention it. The fact that *Origen* (c. 250 C.E.) did not know it and *Eusebius*, decades later, to have known and quoted it, strengthens the hypothesis that interpolations occurred, perhaps at a time between *Origen* and *Eusebius*. If this neutral passage were known to the early Christians, they would not have been inclined to quote it, since it would not provide a *testimonium* (testimony) for apologetic purposes (Van Voorst: 2000: 97).

Disputation: the fact that the early Christians did not mention the *Testimonium*, while knowing it, is a sign that it is entirely an interpolation, and pointed out as an allegation that the original passage should

have been neutral, in so far as it would not have been useful for apologist purposes.

As for the silence of the first Christian authors, we have to consider that many of the first works were lost, so we cannot safely say that no one mentioned the *Testimonium* in the first centuries. In addition, as Bermejo-Rubio argued: “if the text had been really neutral, it is difficult to understand why at least some early apologists would not have quoted it. Even though he did not support specific theological beliefs, early authors could use the great historian Josephus, an unbeliever, as an independent witness to Jesus' wisdom and miracle practices” (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 339). For the mention of Jesus as a sage and a performer of wonderful acts appears in the neutral reconstruction, so if this were Josephus's original wording, at least these compliments would be useful for early apologists to use them as a testimony that Jesus was an extraordinary person. However, some scholars do not consider it that way, they think that, at that time, the first Christians did not admit, due to the strong veneration, that Jesus was referred to by any lesser title than “the Son of God” or “the Lord”, for this reason ignored the *Testimonium*, even if it had this reasonably apologetic neutral wording.

5th Reason: This searches supports in the Arabic version of the *Testimonium's Agapius*, published in 1971 by Schlomo Pines, due to its similarity to the neutral restoration. R. E. Van Voorst argued that none of the hostile claims, present in the derogatory restoration, appear in the Arabic version, thus

reinforcing the hypothesis that the neutral restoration is closer to the original, despite the late dating (10th and 12th century) for the publication of the Arabic version and possible influences of Christian-Muslim rivalry on Arabic translation (Van Voorst, 2000: 97-8).

Disputation: According to those opponents of this hypothesis, both the Arab version and the Syrian version of Michael, the Syrian, depend on previous Syrian chronicles. Alice Whealey argued that both the *Agapius* and Michael versions are derived from the Syrian translation of *Eusebius* in his *Ecclesiastical History*, so they cannot be direct translations of the original Greek. Anyway, “if this analysis is correct, it casts more doubt on the claim that *Agapius*'s version confirms the neutral reconstruction” (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 341).

6th Reason: The support for this is in the passage further in Ant. XVIII.05.02 - § 116-9, about John the Baptist, whose authenticity is recognized by almost all scholars. Josephus' account of John the Baptist is also a descriptive treatment of a popular religious movement with political implications. Josephus describes John the Baptist as a good man, who attracted a large crowd to his teachings, just as Jesus did. John, like Jesus, leads a reform movement within Judaism. In addition, both leaders were killed unjustly, John on suspicion that he might be leading a popular revolt against Herod. The differences also appear, of course, John the Baptist does not perform miracles, the Romans are not involved and Josephus does not mention that his

movement continues. Therefore, if Josephus was able to write sympathetically about a controversial figure like John the Baptist, it indicates that he could also write a neutral description about Jesus (Van Voorst, 2000: 98).

Disputation: Bermejo-Rubio contested, claiming that, "it is doubtful whether Josephus' accounts of John and Jesus can be considered similar" (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 342). John the Baptist's account is literarily and theologically disconnected with the passage about Jesus. Although both attracted crowds, the portrait by Josephus no longer reveals significant coincidences between the two.

In addition, the phrase "both leaders (John and Jesus) were killed unjustly", in fact, reflects the Christian view of Jesus' execution, so it is not possible to ensure that this was the view of Josephus and the Jews at the time. In addition, the deaths of both were caused by different circumstances. John the Baptist was killed because of the paranoia of a single Jewish leader, Herod, who feared a popular revolt, while Jesus was killed on charges of a crowd, many Jewish leaders and then executed by Pilate.

7th Reason: Neutral reconstruction has advantages over derogatory reconstruction due to the best explanation and the best simplicity. As for the explanation, it makes more sense than the derogatory reconstruction because of its mixture of authentic content and interpolated content, in which some parts are manifestly Christian and other parts are manifestly Josephian. Neutral reconstruction

recognizes the likelihood of both. It also explains better the prevailing way of altering the writing of a manuscript by addition and/or subtraction. Rewriting a text completely, as suggested by derogatory reconstruction, is more difficult to succeed. The more literary an author's writing, the more difficult a scribe's attempt to imitate him will be.

As for simplicity, neutral reconstruction meets the test of simplicity. It is the simplest theory to explain everything, or at least most of the facts. It involves less conjecture than most forms of derogatory reconstruction.

For R. E. Van Voorst, derogatory reconstruction builds hypothesis on hypothesis, since it adds several conjectural amendments that have no manuscript support, no support in Josephus' texts and no support from late Christian authors who mentioned Josephus. He concluded: "While certainty is not possible (...) we can conclude that neutral reconstruction is more likely" (Van Voorst, 2000: 98-9).

Disputation: To say that the neutral reconstruction better explains what the original wording might be satisfies only those who believe that the passage really existed. Mixing original content and interpolated content is not a satisfactory justification, when we do not have many clues as to what the original wording might have been and, even more serious, if the paragraph actually existed. In the same way, that derogatory reconstruction builds hypothesis on hypothesis, neutral reconstruction also builds hypothesis on hypothesis, knowing which of the two hypotheses

are more likely is a matter of conjecturing more on one side than on the other.

Bermejo-Rubio observed, “the sentences that are removed add up to 29 words. The *Testimonium* consists of 89 words, so this supposedly simple procedure consists of subtracting a third of the entire passage. It is debatable whether the method of deleting entire sentences, rather than making small changes, is the simplest procedure”. In addition, he concluded: “... a neutral text may be simple, but also too simple to be true” (Bermejo-Rubio, 2014: 344-7).

An Endless Ocean of Speculation

Due to the extent of the controversy, the study above used only the most influential works today, that is, the hypotheses most cited and analyzed by scholars, as addressing all opinions, an attempt that at the moment, with the endless increase in the number of speculation on the subject is a difficult task. Thus, the *Testimonium Flavianum* remains, with no forecast of completion, like a growing ocean of hypotheses. As mentioned at the beginning of this study, certainty about the knowledge of the original text, as well as whether or not the passage existed in the work *The Antiquity of the Jews*, will only be possible with the discovery of Josephus' autograph manuscript, until then, the multiplication of speculations and conjecture will continue to happen, because whatever is proposed, it will simply be hypothesis.

Almost everyone involved in the study of this subject is a Christian, Jew, theologian or teacher of religion, therefore, accustomed to the vagueness and imprecision of religious culture, they are content with the validity of hypotheses and the unanimity of opinions and, with that, lead further research and analysis based on scarce and dubious data. Educated in an environment that favors the formation of a credulous mentality, it is curious to see how religious are interested in hypothetical and conjectural matters, to the point of being convinced with the mere opinion of a majority.

The *Testimonium Flavianum* has already been so stirred and stirred that if Josephus could be hearing what they have already speculated about his text, and if each speculation caused a contortion, he would be so contorted in his grave, that his skeleton would be irretrievably damaged. Anyway, the maximum credibility that can be found in the results of research and analysis in studies on the *Testimonium*, except for a very small number of confirmations, is that some hypotheses are more likely and others less likely. Therefore, until Josephus' autograph manuscript is found, the words "I think that", "may be", "probably", "it's possible", "likely", "perhaps", "I have the impression" and other terms that express uncertainty will continue to multiply in studies on the subject.

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